



# Penwheels Newsletter

Spring Issue 2019

For Escapees Writers, Published or Not

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Penwheels is a private group of Escapees members who enjoy writing and discussing the writing adventure.

The Penwheels Newsletter is digitally published quarterly.



## Jaimie's Tips

Jaimie Bruzenak

Check at libraries for free or low-cost writing events or assistance. The *Mesa Public Library* in the Phoenix metropolitan area has a *writer-in-residence* in a partnership with Arizona State University.

Betty Webb, mystery writer, is the current *writer-in-residence* offering several workshops. Schedule one-on-one appointments with Betty for help.

*Pima County Library* system has a *writer-in-residence* at the *Himmel* branch and there are other writing-related activities as well.

*Tucson Festival of Books*, March 2nd & 3rd held at the University of Arizona. This is a free major event so plan to spend the day.

Our editor, *Margo Armstrong*, is presenting her free workshop:

*Writing & Publishing for Fun & Profit*

**Mesa Main Library Branch**  
**March 5th 12:30–2:00 PM**  
*2nd Floor Board Room*  
**64 East 1st Street.**

Bring your questions about writing, publishing, and promotion. Published authors are invited to attend and share experiences.



## Braggin' Rights

Joanne Alexakis

Joanne Alexakis wrote a short piece in the *Escapees Newsletter* about the **North Ranch Bead & Polymer Clay Retreat** on March 24-29, 2019, in Congress, AZ. (page 23).

Joanne invites you all to attend this enjoyable & enriching event for a day or two (or more!) if you are in the area.

## Why You Can't Stop Learning

As writers, we must continually fill our minds with new thoughts and ideas, bits of trivia, and information about a wide variety of subjects.

It all comes out eventually in some form in our writing. And most authors I admire claim you must read voraciously if you want to be a good writer.

I'm going one step further than saying we must merely read. We must actively learn new things and apply that knowledge.

What good is learning if you don't act upon it?





## Balancing Act

Ellen Behrens

A huge “thank you” to all Penwheels who entered the short story contest last fall! I discovered quite a bit about what’s working for them and what’s not.

I was even reminded of some things I need to improve on myself.

JK Rowling, author of the Harry Potter novels, has said, “I just write what I wanted to write. I write what amuses me. It’s totally for myself. I never in my wildest dreams expected this popularity.” One thing was clear to me from all the contest entries is we’re all doing what JK Rowling has been doing: writing what strikes us as fun or intriguing to write about.

Over the years, I’ve been approached by many people to write their story. “I have this great idea, but I’m not much of a writer. I could tell it to you and you could write it down,” they say. I always tell them the same thing: “It’s your story. **You** should write it. You’ll tell it better than anyone else could.”

Those folks are right, though: the best stories and novels require a combination of great writing and a compelling story.

If your reader stumbles over the words, can’t follow the structure or make sense of what they’re reading, they’re going to give up before they finish—no matter how well-plotted the story.

On the other hand, you could be an amazing writer, someone who turns an elegant phrase or cap-

tures perfect description but loses readers before they get to the last page because the story just isn’t moving along.

I saw this in the contest entries: stories written, as Rowling says, because they were the stories the writers wanted to write, not because they thought a particular story could win a contest.

I read some fantastic writing—in the midst of something that wasn’t quite a story (yet!). Other stories were whole, but the writing wasn’t as polished as it could have been. Maureen Kay Lynch’s winning story “Chance Encounter” had the best balance of story and quality of writing across the entries.

Readers don’t ask for much: they just want to be transported somewhere, immersed in another world or plunged into someone else’s life for awhile.

And when they’re done reading, they want to feel it was worth the time they spent with those characters, in that time and place, away from their own families and friends in the real world.

“All of fiction is a practical joke: making people care, laugh, cry or be nauseated or whatever by something which absolutely is not going on at all,” wrote Kurt Vonnegut. “Like saying, ‘Hey, your pants are on fire!’”

Achieving that as a writer is a tricky business, but at its simplest level, it all comes down to keeping your balance.

*Ellen Behrens ([ellenbooks.com](http://ellenbooks.com)) is the award-winning author of three novels, a short story collection, and two nonfiction books, including her Rollin RV Mystery Series. She and her husband have been full-time RVers since 2009.*

## From the Editor

### Writing Tips for the New Year

First, schedule your writing time like you would a dentist’s appointment. Why? Because as Dorothy Parker once said, “I hate writing; I love to have written.”

We all hate going to the dentist, and most of the time, we also hate writing—coming up with words for the page is like pulling teeth. But after we’ve gotten the gumption and gotten it done, the afterglow of the results ranges from satisfaction to ecstasy.

So put it down on your calendar. And then, as soon as it is over, schedule your follow-up visit before you leave the office or you’ll never get around to it.

Next, during your writing session, don’t sit in front of a blank page trying to come up with something to say.

Rather, let your mind wander to favorite memories, favorite subjects, or even to problems, worries or fears, and just write about them. Consider it a warm-up exercise before you get your game on.

As you warm-up, you’ll find that your mind naturally begins to feel its way around the subject you intend to write about.

And at some point, you’ll come up with an idea on that topic that is so logistically important or emotionally powerful to that you find you’ve already started writing about it instead of the warm-up topics.

Third . . .

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## **4 Writing Tips for Novelists**

### **1. Novels Aren't Stories**

A novel can be extremely free form. Some are simply narratives about a fictional experience. Others are a collection of several stories that may or may not be intertwined.

Don't feel confined to tell a single story, straight through, beginning to end. Unlike screenplays which must continue to move, you can stop the story and diverge into any area you like, as long as you can hold your reader's interest.

### **2. Get Into Your Characters' Heads**

One of the most powerful opportunities of the novel format is the ability to describe what a character is thinking in the moment.

In movies or stage plays (with exceptions) you must show what the character is thinking through action and/or dialog. But in a novel, you can just come out and say it.

Most novels are enhanced by drawing the reader into the minds of the character's themselves.

### **3. Keep A Daily Log Of Tidbits**

One of the biggest differences between a pedestrian novel and a riveting one are the clever little quips, concepts, snippets of dialog, and fresh metaphors.

### **4. Don't Hold Back**

Unlike screenplays, there are no budget constraints in a book. You can write, "The entire solar system exploded, one planet at a time," as easily as you can write, "a leaf fell from the tree."

Details . . .

## **Find an Editor—10 Tips**

**Fiverr.com** is a website that offers writers, editors, proofreaders, cover design artists, and literally every task that can be done remotely.

Are you are ready to augment your team with a skilled freelancer?

Short-term or longer term, here are a few insights to help you get ready to find and hire a freelancer that is a right fit for your project.

It does take some experience on this site to find a suitable match. The gigs start at \$5 and increase with the expertise of the person.

Hopefully the tips presented here help you find what you need.

**1.** Map out why you're hiring them and what you're hiring them for.

**2.** Write a stellar job post that speaks to the cream of the crop.

**3.** Look for associated accolades, test scores, or badges to indicate highly skilled freelancers.

**4.** Freelancers in different time zones can offer a competitive advantage.

**5.** You get what you pay for.

**6.** Don't be vague about deadlines.

**7.** Have a plan in place to protect your intellectual property (IP).

**8.** Interview the freelancer virtually—but try video for a more "face to face" feel.

**9.** Vet freelancers with a paid test project for even more insight.

**10.** Make an offer, agree on terms, then work up a contract.

More details . . .

## **Getting a Professional Cover Design**

A professional designer brings more than just Photoshop skills to the table. Book cover design is a complex balance of images, text, and information.

You need someone who understands how each of these elements interacts with the others to best sell your book.

A designer who specializes in book jackets understands how readers respond to layout and typography.

They understand the current trends and can see how your cover will compete in the market.

Most importantly, they will know how to communicate the right message with your cover.

Your cover is also a book marketing tool. That means that you should be able to quantify its value in a dollars-and-cents way.

To show you how a professional cover can change your book's fortunes, look at real-life case studies.

There are plenty of places on the internet where you can find designers advertising their services.

Some of them will be legitimate freelancers with years of great experience, but a vast majority of them will not.

With that in mind, your first priority is to seek out designers with a great portfolio and a track record of creating great covers within your genre.

Read on . . .

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## **Designing a Cover Yourself**

Book cover design is a complex balance of images, text, and information—and you need someone who understands how each of these elements interacts with the others to best sell your book.

### **Find inspiration and ideas.**

Apart from your ability to execute a design, the most important aspect of book covers is their ability to connect with the target market

### **Choose your design software.**

Basically, any graphical software can be used to design a cover. Some programs are suitable for non-professionals, but those, like *Canva* are incredibly easy to use and can produce some smart-looking covers. *Amazon KDP* provides *Cover Creator*, a basic but adequate place to start.

### **Find free images.**

You'd be surprised how many authors take images from Google searches without paying for them. This is illegal, and likely to land you with a letter from the rights holder asking for damages.

### **Get your typography right.**

Typography, or the use of lettering on the cover, is something almost all non-professional cover designers struggle with.

### **Export the correct file format.**

For an ebook, you'll simply need to export your front cover as a JPEG. For a paperback, a PDF file is required for front and back covers.

[More . . .](#)

## **World of Publishing**

### **The Game Plan**

#### **Become a Best-Selling Self-Published Author**

Today, anyone with a laptop can publish books. An author myself, my e-books have reached Amazon best-selling status multiple times.

While skeptics say that if it's not a New York Times best-seller, then it's not a "real" best-seller, writers shouldn't be discouraged.

It's completely possible for best-selling authors to become millionaires by self-publishing on Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing platform.

The thing is, not every best-selling author is a millionaire. I certainly am not (yet).

In this article, we'll discuss what you need to know about Amazon and what you can do to make your book stand out among millions of book titles.

It's a game plan for self-published authors. For practicality, we'll use the Amazon KDP path as an example: it's not the only platform available, but some of the advice will be specific to it.

Equipped with this 12-step plan, you can start writing your future best-selling book with confidence.

Your dream of becoming an Amazon best-selling author is definitely reachable. Yes, this is true.

[The rest of the story . . .](#)

### **Publisher Claims Copyright**

It's not super-common, but I do see it from time to time in contracts that I review, primarily from smaller presses: a publisher *explicitly claiming ownership of the editing it provides, or making the claim implicitly by reverting rights only to the original manuscript* submitted by the author.

Are there legal grounds for such a claim? One would think that by printing a copyright notice inside a published book, and registering copyright in the author's name or encouraging the author to do so, publishers are implicitly acknowledging that there is not.

It's hard to know, though, because it doesn't seem to have been tested in the courts. There's not even much discussion of the issue.

Where you do find people talking about it, it's in the context of editors as independent contractors, such as how authors hiring freelancers should make sure they own the editor's work product, or how freelance editors might use a claim of copyright interest as leverage in payment disputes.

In 2011, *Romance Writers of America* published a brief legal opinion on its website (still on the website, but unfortunately no longer accessible by the public), indicating that the claim would probably not prevail in court.

But that's the only legal discussion I've been able to find. The legal ambiguity of a copyright claim on editing is good reason to treat it as a publishing contract red flag. But that's not all.

[Read on . . .](#)



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## Writer's Marketplace

**P**ersonal Essay is any nonfiction story written in first person. Personal essays always involve a true experience, especially one that evokes emotions that speak to a broader audience.

Like the short story, personal essays are structured, have a theme, and usually involve a moral or message of some kind. Literary journals and niche magazines listed below are willing to pay substantially for these essays. Devoting a few hours to writing one is worth your consideration.

Here are a few examples:

- The Boston Globe
- The 3288 Review
- Bugle Magazine's Women in the Outdoors column
- Chicken Soup for the Soul

The rest of the story . . .

### Virtual Assistant \$

Part-time, remote contract job. Pays \$18.00 an hour. Long-term role. Needs experience with CRM software and WordPress and needs to be tech savvy. Needs to enjoy being empowered to make what they are working on better, and go above and beyond daily.

### Principal Medical Writer \$

The home-based principal medical writer will prepare and edit clinical reports, write study protocols, and serve as lead writer on submissions projects. Qualifications include complex medical or science writing experience and an advanced degree.

## Freelance Writing

If you want to break into freelance writing, here is a different path where you do get some pay. It is paid writing internships.

I can't imagine the pay is much but it would allow you to build up credits along with receiving some income.

Read on . . .

## Contest and Award Fakes

Fake contests and awards come in many different guises, but they all have a common goal—to take your money.

More information . . .

### **Contest Caution: Waldorf Publishing's Manuscript Contest**

This contest from Waldorf Publishing, "*is always seeking new talent to add to our extensive roster.*"

I'm going to count the red flags that are evident just from the contest and Waldorf's website—plus the secret one that you'd never know was there because Waldorf actively conceals it.

**Red flag number one:** the contest rules. These don't look so bad, until you get to this:

*Entrants retain copyright, but so does Waldorf? Say what? They can't both be true.*

If Waldorf is this confused about its rules—or about the difference between rights and copyright—it is not a good sign. (I suspect the latter: I've seen Waldorf contracts, and they don't claim copyright.)

The rest of the story . . .

## How to Properly Pitch Publications

**A**s writers, we want our words in front of as many eyes as possible. This requires pitching publications and growing our bylines. So let's look at a few ways to pitch without causing the publication to delete your request.

### ◆ Do Your Homework

Look for the publications submission process and follow their guidelines. Know their content before pitching to their tone and voice.

### ◆ Be Professional

Make sure your pitch eMail is professional and grammatically correct. Your pitch is the first impression of your writing and you as a person. The last thing you want a *publisher* to see is a pitch with less-than-stellar writing.

### ◆ Don't Waste my Time

Pitch emails should be courteous, professional, and to the point. Including an entire paragraph informing me you don't want to waste my time is, in fact, wasting my time.

Pitching publications is not difficult. It is time-consuming and tedious. Put in the time to do it right and publishers will notice.

Details . . .

*It is perfectly okay to write garbage—as long as you edit brilliantly.*

...*CJ Cherryfi*

